DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 800 UD 030 719

AUTHOR Guthrie, Larry F.
TITLE New Trends in Educating At-Risk Students. Policy Update, Number One.
INSTITUTION Far West Lab. for Educational Research and Development, San Francisco, Calif.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 91
CONTRACT 400-86-0009
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; *Ancillary School Services; Curriculum Development; Educational Policy; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; *High Risk Students; Integrated Activities; Nontraditional Education; *Teacher Expectations of Students; Teaching Methods; Time Factors (Learning); Trend Analysis; *Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

As the negative effects of traditional approaches to the problems of at-risk students have become known, several promising new trends have been recognized. First among these is the belief that all students benefit from raised expectations. A curriculum that builds on the knowledge and strengths students bring to school can capitalize on the ability of all students to learn. A schoolwide approach is generally replacing piecemeal efforts that separate disadvantaged children. Access to improved curriculum and instruction is recognized as a necessity. To cut down on fragmentation, schools are devising better ways to coordinate supplemental and regular instruction. Increasing instructional time is recognized as a need, and new ways are being found to extend teaching time. Parent involvement is another aspect that is receiving increased attention, as the vital role of parents is recognized. Yet another trend is toward the integration of services for children so that social services and school services can be linked. Ensuring that these trends continue will not be easy, but the progress to date gives cause for optimism. (Contains 6 resources.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 389 800

New Trends in Educating At-Risk Students

Larry F. Guthrie

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

UD030 719

FarWest LABORATORY

Policy Update

1991 NUMBER ONE

New Trends in Educating At-Risk Students

Larry F. Guthrie

Growing numbers of children in America feel the effects of poverty, substance abuse, cultural and linguistic differences, and changing family structures. Despite renewed and increased attention to their needs, thousands of students are failing to learn. Dropout rates remain unacceptably high. And even high school graduates are often unable to read, write, or compute.

Obviously, what we've been doing for students at risk hasn't succeeded. For the most part, schools have attempted to treat weaknesses or deficiencies one at a time. For students who are behind academically, basic skills remediation has been the solution of choice. Students are separated into small groups for short periods of time, where teachers drill them on discrete skills. However logical such approaches might seem, recent research shows they don't work:

- The curriculum offered low-performing students is restricted to low-level, remedial skills.
- A reliance on teacher-directed' instruction and seatwork doesn't allow students to exercise initiative in structuring academic tasks.
- Supplemental services add little to the total amount of reading and math instruction students receive.
- The instructional program for disadvantaged students is fragmented across a variety of special programs.
- Grouping by ability or achievement isolates disadvantaged students and limits their opportunities to interact with others.
- Social services are poorly coordinated and not well integrated into the school program.
- Parents of disadvantaged students are only superficially involved with their children's education, and students' home life and culture are not taken into account in teaching.

Promising New Trends

As the negative effects of traditional approaches have become known, several promising new trends have emerged:

Raised expectations for disadvantaged students. Current thinking is that 1) every child can acquire more sophisticated reasoning and problem-solving skills, and 2) conventional approaches underestimate students' capabilities and postpone more challenging work for too long. What's needed is a curriculum that builds on the knowledge and experience students bring to school and balances routine and complex tasks. Moreover, teachers and other school staff must believe in the ability of all children to learn.

Things are changing. Schools are integrating supplemental services into the regular classroom instead of using a pull-out approach and relying on certified teachers, rather than instructional aides, to deliver instruction to all children.

Raising expectations is an essential part of several prominent new demonstration programs. In Levin's *Accelerated Schools*, for example, the goal is for all students in the school to achieve at or above grade-level by the end of sixth grade. To carry this off, the principal, teachers, students, and parents agree on a finite set of common goals and are empowered to set school policy and chart the direction of the overall program.

A schoolwide approach. Today, piecemeal programs are being discarded in favor of improvements that integrate disadvantaged children into the regular program and benefit the whole school.

Although single programs and teachers can make a difference for students, their impact is enhanced if they are part of a comprehensive set of interrelated services. This kind of thinking forms the basis for "schoolwide projects" now encouraged through Chapter 1, as well as Slavin's *Success For All* program and Comer's *School Development Program*.

In Comer's program, schools set up two improvement teams: 1) The Mental Health Team (a social worker, psychologist, and special education teacher) uses a case management approach to ensure that needed services are made available to troubled kids; 2) The Governance and Management Team (the principal, a member of the mental health team, a teacher, and selected parents) sets school policy and designs the overall improvement plan.

Success For All relies less on school teams than on a comprehensive and complementary set of instructional components: a half-day preschool and a full day kindergarten, a structured reading program of 90 minutes per day, reading tutors, and a Family Support Team that offers parenting skills training and fosters parent involvement.

Access to improved curriculum and instruction. Schools are also finding ways to improve students' access to a broader curriculum and more advanced skills. Simple-minded worksheets and dittos have been replaced with grade-level textbooks, tradebooks, and stories. But upgrading the curriculum is only the first step — schools also have to introduce instructional strategies that will allow low-performing students to understand the new materials and use them to achieve. Through cognitive modeling and guided practice, teachers can demonstrate thinking processes and learning behaviors. Varied grouping strategies, such as cooperative learning, offer disadvantaged students more opportunities. Cross-age tutoring matches more experienced learners with younger students who need help.

Program coordination. To cut down on fragmentation, schools are coming up with more effective ways to coordinate supplemental and regular instruction. This doesn't mean creating supplemental lessons that just do "more of the same," however. Where the regular program uses an adopted text, other materials can form the basis for pre-reading activities, or tradebooks can be used for additional reading.

UD030719

Simply strengthening curricular and instructional ties isn't enough, though. School leadership has to recognize and support the need for careful planning and developing a collegial atmosphere.

By providing supplemental services in the regular classroom, teachers and specialist instructors can plan and deliver lessons jointly, so that each always knows what the other is doing. A multi-funded "facilitator" can organize and maintain linkages across a range of categorical programs.

Extended time. Research has shown that supplemental programs have typically added little instructional time per day; they simply redistributed a fixed amount. Until recently, less than two percent of districts receiving Chapter 1 funds offered before- or after-school lessons.

Increasing students' quality instructional time may be done in a variety of ways. Before- and after-school lessons, for example, can be offered as a split-day program, where half the eligible students come early and half stay late. "Back-to-back" programs double the morning reading time for low-achieving students.

Parent involvement. In general, schools can take three approaches to parent involvement; 1) inform parents of school routine, standards, and expectations; 2) recruit parents to provide input into school program design; 3) engage parents in their children's instructional activities, at home or at school.

To involve parents in their children's learning, schools enlist parents as volunteer aides and tutors, or they train parents to supplement their children's education at home and at school. Workshops show parents and children how to make learning materials together, assign homework that parents and children complete together, or expose parents to educational games they can play at home. Parents also are encouraged to provide a study area at home for the child, read to their child, and set aside a regular time for homework. Schools must remember, however, that every parent community is unique, and strategies for involving parents need to be tailored locally.

Integration of services for children. The array of social service agencies, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private institutions, set up to meet the increasingly complex needs of children and youth, have become compartmentalized and uncoordinated. Specialization has created a jumble of single-issue programs.

But coordination and improvement of services is of growing national interest. Several community-school groups have set up procedures for periodic, multiagency networking and information-sharing. Some are also looking at new community structures that encompass planning, joint funding of projects, creation of horizontal (rather than vertical) linkages, improved accountability systems, and the involvement of parents, students, businesses, and the community.

The Future

Ensuring that these trends continue will not be easy; the flawed approaches described earlier are still the norm in all too many schools. Still, the progress being made gives us cause for optimism. On a national level, networks such as Re: Learning (a collaboration of the Education Commission of the States and the Coalition of Essential Schools) are exploring better ways to disseminate information about effective practices and help schools with implementation. In addition, most states are sponsoring improvement efforts, and many districts and schools are indeed finding better ways to serve students at risk. Finally, research is looking at key issues like the selection of approaches for particular schools, the amount and type of staff training and on-site assistance needed, the formation of site leadership teams, effective networking mechanisms, and appropriate monitoring and evaluation.

Resources

Guthrie, G.P., & Guthrie, L.F. (1990). *Streamlining interagency collaboration for youth at risk: Issues for educators.* San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Guthrie, L.F. (1989). *What schools can do for students at risk.* San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Guthrie, L.F., Guthrie, G.P., & van Heusden, S. (1990). *Providing options for at-risk youth: The Health and Media Academies in Oakland* [Final report]. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Guthrie, L.F., Guthrie, G.P., van Heusden, S., & Burns, R. (1989). *Principles of successful Chapter 1 programs: A guidebook for rural educators.* San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Guthrie, L.F., Long, C., Guthrie, G.P. (1989). *Strategies for dropout prevention.* San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Rowan, B., Guthrie, L.F. (1989). The quality of Chapter 1 instruction: Results from a study of 24 schools. In R.E. Slavin, N.L. Karweit, & N.A. Madden (Eds.), *Effective programs for students at risk* (pp. 195-219). New York: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

POLICY UPDATE

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development serves the four-state region of Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah, working with educators at all levels to plan and carry out school improvements. The mission of FWL is to assist educators in the region by linking them with colleagues; sharing information, expertise and innovative practices; and providing technical assistance to build local capacity for continued self-improvement.

Far West Laboratory
730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
(415) 565-3000

This publication is supported by federal funds from the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, contract no. 400-86-0009. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations, imply endorsement. Reprinting is encouraged with proper credit.